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Working In Hot Conditions

Heat, whether it's inside or outside, work or play, it can be a health hazard. If you don't know when enough becomes too much, you can suffer from some form of heat stress. Heat stress can range from a momentary problem to a full emergency situation.

When we are at work we try to keep the workplace from getting unhealthy, but some jobs, such as welding or working in confined spaces, can get pretty hot. As with other reactions some people are more easily affected by heat than others.

Let's review the conditions that cause heat related health problems, the symptoms to watch out for, and the actions to take if they strike you or a co-worker.

General Hazards

The human body is designed to operate within a fairly narrow temperature range. If your body temperature goes too high, you get sick.

Heat exhaustion occurs most likely when you are physically active when it is hot. You will probably get dizzy and sweaty, but it's not likely to be life-threatening.

Heatstroke is much more serious. It is also caused by being physically active when the weather conditions are hot. The major hazard with heatstroke is that it can send your body temperature so high that you become unconscious. One of the other problems with being exposed to any of the heat related health hazards is that they put so much strain on your heart and blood vessels that you risk heart failure or stroke during the disorders. Those with heart or circulatory problems are at the greatest risk. Their bodies are the least able to take the strain and may not perspire and cool the body properly.

If you are working outside, there are other hazards you must look out for and take proper precautions. Skin cancer is one of them which is the result of too much sun, and sunburn from too much sun when you're not used to it.

Identifying Hazards

If you know the symptoms of heat stress, you will have a better chance of keeping the symptoms in hand. The symptoms that indicate heat stress can also be indicators of other health problems. If you are getting a workout and it is hot, heat stress is more than likely your prime hazard. When you start to feel hot, uncomfortable, and just not

ready to do much, you do not have a serious problem. Here are the symptoms that could indicate a serious problem: Dizziness, rapid heartbeat, nausea, cramps, headache, excessive sweating, chest pain, breathing problems, weakness, and diarrhea.

Heatstroke Signs

If you show any of the following heatstroke signs, consider this a serious problem and take the appropriate action.

- *High temperature
- *Hot red, dry skin
- *Rapid pulse

As mentioned earlier, skin cancer is another problem and you should know the signs of it. If you notice a mole or skin spot with these characteristics see your doctor.

- *One half is different from the other
- *The border is irregular
- *There are different colors
- *It seems to be growing

Protection Against Hazards

To protect yourself against the hazards:

- *Dress for conditions. Lightweight, light-colored loose clothing is best. Wear a wide brim hat, put on sunscreen to exposed parts of the body.
- *Eat a regular well-balanced diet, try to stay away from heavy or hot food. Watch your salt consumption.
- *Drink plenty of fluids. Don't wait until you are thirsty. As you sweat you are losing fluids and you must replace them. Water is the best choice, avoid anything with caffeine or alcohol.
- *Use sunscreen outside and cover as much of your body as possible with clothing.
- *Build up your exposure to the sun slowly. The peak hours of the strong sun is between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. You can get sunburned in cloudy weather. The sun is more potent when its reflected off water, concrete, or sand.

So far this summer we have not seen the hot spell as last year, however, August has been known for its hot weather. If it's hot and you feel dizzy, weak, sweaty, or nauseous take action. Get to a cooler area, lie down, loosen your clothes, cool compresses, and drink fluids.